

DOE NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

August 10, 2005

Hanford Uranium Fuel Removal Completed 16 Months Ahead of Schedule

In a significant step toward cleanup of Hanford's Columbia River Corridor, the last of 20 million uranium fuel pieces manufactured at the site have been safely removed ahead of schedule and under budget.

Workers with contractor Fluor Hanford removed more than 1,300 boxes containing more than 80,000 low-enriched fuel rods from the nuclear fuel fabrication facilities located in Hanford's 300 Area, which is near the City of Richland. The completion of the work paves the way for demolishing facilities where the fuel was stored.

The project began in November 2004 and was completed 16 months ahead of a Tri-Party Agreement milestone and more than a million dollars under budget. The material was packaged and disposed of in a lined disposal facility at Hanford.

"Removing this material further reduces risk to the environment and allows us to move forward with cleanup near the Columbia River," said Leif Erickson, DOE assistant manager for the River Corridor. "It also allows us to remain on track to complete additional Tri-Party Agreement milestones in the 300 Area ahead of schedule."

Removing the 825 metric tons of uranium fuel has eliminated the costs associated with maintaining facilities with nuclear materials.

"I want to commend our crews for moving the uranium safely," said Mike Lackey, Fluor Hanford Deactivation and Decommissioning vice president. "These are the type of projects that pay dividends over the long run—eliminating risk while reducing costs for maintaining nuclear facilities."

During Hanford's production era—from the 1940s to the 1980s—more than 20 million pieces of fuel were manufactured in the 300 Area for Hanford's nuclear reactors along the Columbia River. Fuel irradiated in the reactors was processed to obtain the tiny amount of plutonium in each fuel rod.

Now that the last of the uranium fuel has been removed, the Department of Energy can continue to accelerate the demolition of facilities in the 300 Area without the inherent risk of stored radioactive material.

Two hundred facilities in Hanford's 300 Area are scheduled for final decommissioning and demolition by 2015 as part of the River Corridor Closure Contract, recently awarded to Washington Closure Hanford.

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RL-05-0004